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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - PARA 6 CLASSIFICATION CHANGED

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: EMIRATI NEWSPAPER FORCED TO SUSPEND PUBLICATION

Classified by Ambassador Richard Olson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Local Arabic daily, Al Emarat Al Youm, was ordered on July 2 to suspend publication for 20 days and its Chief Executive Officer and Editor-in-Chief each fined 20,000 Dirhams (Approx. 5500 USD), following the 2006 publication of an article accusing Abu Dhabi ruling family members of race horse doping. Court proceedings began in January 2007 and only were completed in July, ¶2009. Post documented the case in the Freedom of Speech sections of both the 2007 and 2008 Human Rights Reports. The ruling comes down in the context of an already tense media atmosphere created by the newly passed media law and the creation of a new court in Abu Dhabi that will deal exclusively with media cases. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In both the 2007 and 2008 Human Rights Reports, in the context of freedom of speech restrictions, Post reported the suspension of publication of Al Emarat Al Youm and the fining of its CEO and Editor and Chief. The ban and fines stemmed from the paper's 2006 publication a story entitled "Doping Scandal at Warsan Stables in the Emirates" that accused ruling family members Sheikh Hazza bin Sultan bin Zayed al Nahyan and Sheikh Khaled bin Sultan bin Zayed al Nahyan of doping their race horses competing in international racing events.

¶3. (SBU) The fines were initially issued on April 29, 2007 but never enforced. According to a journalist at an English language daily, the suspension of the paper was added to the sentence later, but the case remained under appeal until the court's July 2 ruling. This week's enforcement of the ban and the fines is the culmination of several appeals by the paper and the dismissal by a Federal Supreme Court judge of the paper's evidence to support its article.

¶4. (SBU) Local media contacts told emboffs that the ruling was based on the outdated penal code of a 1980 media law. Our contacts bemoaned the severity of the ruling and its timing particularly as the UAEG attempts to woo more international media outlets to the country. One journalist from the UAE's official news agency WAM (Emirates News Agency) said the Al Emarat Al Youm editor knew that the publication of the story would be "like walking through a field of landmines" and by publishing the story anyway, the editor increased the legitimacy and readership numbers of his paper.

¶5. (SBU) In a direct reaction to the July 2 ruling, Al Khaleej (circulation approximately 90,000) published an anonymous editorial entitled "A Group Punishment" which commented that rulings by a "reputable court must be respected" but that the restrictive and anachronistic law required re-evaluation. The editorial implored the UAEG to look to the future and pointed out that group punishments of this nature were retrogressive and counterproductive.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The UAEG's reaction is not a surprise in the context of the much-criticized 2008 media law which clearly outlines the consequences of publication of articles that malign "a ruling family" in the UAE. What is a surprise is the decision to enforce the sentence at this time when the public had almost forgotten about it. As one contact pointed out, "it may simply be a matter of

cleaning house". Journalists are making linkages between this case and the recently announced specialized court created in Abu Dhabi to deal with lawsuits involving the media --- including cases of "libel, defamation, and untruthful reporting." With UAE media already practicing self-censorship, there is increased concern that the government will take steps to reinforce its own role in drawing the lines within which the media operate here.

OLSON